

If I Have to Go by ObeyDontStray

Series: [Coffee and Contemplation and Kisses \[1\]](#)

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Summary:

Teenaged Joyce and Hopper are growing up and growing apart. Then, as adults they have to deal with the lingering feelings.

1. If I Have to Go

Author's Note:

Heavily inspired by Tom Waits' songs 'If I Have to Go' and 'Hold On'

She met him at the park swings at midnight, just like she promised. They swayed in silence next to each other for a few heartbeats, unsure of just what to say. He lit a cigarette and passed it to her before lighting another for himself.

"Shouldn't you be sleeping?" She interjected, breaking the silence between them. "I know you ship out pretty early in the morning."

He said nothing, but noticed her skin prickling in the crisp night air. He shrugged out of his jean jacket and passed it to her. She accepted it without pause and slid her arms into it, instantly being swallowed up in it's larger size.

"I still wish you would go with me." He said sadly, watching her feet kick in the sand as she made another swing. "I've got enough for a little apartment in the city. It'll be small, but we can make it home until I get out of academy."

She sighed heavily, her breath making a small cloud in the cold air. "There's nothing out there in the big city for me, Jimmy."

"Yes there is. Me," He retorted, stopping short on his swing to look over at her.

She swung higher and blocked out her view of the moon with the toe of her sneaker.

"I'll take a part time job while I'm in academy. Joyce, we can work this out. You just have to take this first step with me."

"I just don't know, Jimmy. You're talking about settling down and I don't know if I'm ready for all of that."

"I'm talking about moving in together. If things fall apart Hawkins

will always be here. And you know as well as I do that it'll stay the same."

"I want to live some before I settle down, ya know? I wanna travel some. I'm just not ready to start being an adult, ya know? You're on a fast track to being Hop the cop and I don't know if I'm ready to be chained to a place like that.

Silence fell between them once more as they both nursed their cigarettes and swung in the darkness. "Will you remember me?" He asked sadly, kicking at the sand.

"Of course."

"I'll make it in the city. You'll see. And I'll come back for you. When I have a nice place and nice cars and all the things you deserve. Will you wait for me, Joyce?"

Her big brown eyes traveled over to him. "That's unfair. You know I can't promise that."

"There's someone else, isn't there?"

Her eyes widened with surprise at his question. "No! That's just an unfair thing to push on someone, Jimmy. I can't promise that. Our lives are taking different paths, that's all. Growing apart."

He slid from the swing and stood upright, tucking his hands into his jeans pockets and keeping his back to her. "Am I that easy to let go of?" He asked, his voice barely above a whisper. He heard the crunch of her shoes as she stood up too, stomping out her cigarette and wrapped her arms around his middle, her cold face pressed against his back.

"No. This isn't easy for me either, you know? I love you, Jim Hopper."

"Then come with me!" He fumed, his muscles tensing against her. Her felt her balled up fists against his back. With no force behind them they were merely a gesture of her frustration.

"Why don't you come with me? Let's leave right now, set off for California!"

"You know I can't do that." He said flatly. "Seems like we're at an impasse." He added, flicking his cigarette to the ground and stomping it out with his boot.

He turned to her and took her cold hands in his. "You always make things so damn hard, Joyce. There was a time that it was kinda thrilling. I had to fight so hard to get your affection. Now it seems like you just won't let me fight to keep you."

She looked down at their shoes, worrying her bottom lip between her teeth.

"I was going to ask you to marry me. Once we moved out of this shit hole and I graduated academy. I didn't figure you were so appalled at the idea of a white picket fence and children."

"I'm not against it! I'm just not ready for it." Tears welled up in her eyes and he wiped them away with his thumbs, framing her small face with his big hands.

"I understand. I think. You take that California trip-" He offered, resting his forehead against hers. "I'm coming back in a few years. And if you're ready, I'm taking you back with me."

He curled a ringlet of her hair, which she wore in a loose fishtail braid to her waist, between his fingers absent-mindedly. "Don't wear your hair like this till I come back, okay?" He teased, leaning forward to kiss her cheek. "Save your braids just for me."

In the morning she met him at his house. "Sorry, I wore it home." She explained, shrugging out of his jacket and offering it to him.

"Keep it." He said, pushing it back to her as he tossed his bag into the backseat of his old beater. He leaned back against the car then, pulling her closer by the hips.

"One last offer. Come with me." She shook her head.

"I can't." With a sad look he nodded. "I love you, Joyce."

"I love you too."

And with that he kissed her goodbye. Long, slow, and sweet. "I'm coming back for you." He promised and she nodded as he climbed into the drivers seat.

She stood in his driveway and watched him leave. With her hands tucked into the sleeves of his coat, she wiped away the tears that were threatening to fall.

Later that day she cut her hair to shoulder length and would never wear it in braids again.

A year later he caught word in the city. Joyce was expecting her first child any day now. A little boy. With that Byers kid, Lonnie. He guessed she never took her trip to California. Jim buried his heartbreak in the bottom of any bottle he could find until she walked into the coffee shop and into his life one day. Diane. A tall, blonde knockout. The exact opposite of everything Joyce was.

Joyce had another son, he heard it through the grapevine.

Diane shared his bed so eventually he shared his name. She was perfectly fine with a ring and a white picket fence.

Then Sarah came and his life changed.

Then Sarah passed away and his life changed again.

Then Diane slipped through his fingers as easily as she had slipped into them.

2. Hopper's Blues

Summary for the Chapter:

When Hopper's life in the city falls apart, he decides to go back to square one. Home.

Hopper drew another drag from his cigarette, his eyes flickering to the mile marker sign. His lips set into a grim line around it. He was still about fifty miles from Hawkins. Buck Owens sang over the radio. The old Ford surged beneath him, something banged under the hood. "Shit." He muttered to the empty cab. Black clouds gathered in the sky, cool air rushed in through the open windows. "Please let me get home. Please." His right hand moved from the wheel to the bridge of his nose and he sighed heavily. He caught a glimpse of the blue hairband on his wrist and his heart did a somersault in his chest. Sarah. The corners of his eyes stung and he wiped at them with the back of his hand before reaching in the center console for his shades. The truck hiccuped again and he mentally urged it forward. If it meant him blowing this damn truck up, he wasn't stopping until he made it home. Please keep rolling.

In the backseat sat two black trash bags. Everything in the world he owned now. Hop glanced down at his left hand, at the empty indentation around his ring finger. He'd have to get used to writing ex in front of wife. The breakup had been a mutual thing. A mutual sense that they'd suffered an incurable loss and nothing could fix it. After Sarah, there was no going back. He couldn't muster up the effort to try and fix anything. His whole life had been buried with his little girl and now was just a matter of...existing. Hopper tossed his cigarette butt out the window. Eyes trained on the empty road, he fished around the console until his fingers closed around the prescription bottle, with a flick he popped the top and shook a single pill into his mouth. From there he capped it and reached for the Pepsi bottle. Anxiety pills. He'd been prescribed them two weeks to the day after her funeral. Grief. Depression. Anxiety. All fancy words for the

massive black hole his soul was circling. Twenty five miles from Hawkins, now. Twenty five miles. Waylon Jennings played on the radio.

Lightning flashed across the sky, lighting up the dark sky. The thunder clapped harshly, shaking the truck. Fifteen miles till Hawkins. Heavy raindrops splattered on the windshield, obscuring his vision momentarily. He sighed heavily, flicking on the wipers. Fifteen more miles. Just fifteen. He whispered a mental prayer that the ancient truck would make it that far. He hadn't a clue what he'd do once he got there, but that was his aim. Mom and Dad are gone. He'd sold their place years ago. No living relatives left back at home. Very few friends left. Hot shot Hop the cop had burnt most of his bridges before he left for the big city. What a fool he'd been to think moving off to the city would make everything so much better. He retrieved his last cigarette and held it between his teeth, flicking his Zippo to life to light it.

Five miles from Hawkins. George Jones played and the truck lurched, knocking out a distress signal from under the hood. Hop drew in a deep breath, willing the old truck on. Five more miles, old man. Five more miles and you can give up the ghost. Just get me home. In the dash the needle hung just under the overheating mark. The truck lurched again and suddenly died beneath him, coasting down the highway. He rode out the momentum as far as he could before pulling over and he leaned across the seats, digging around in his trash bags. One advantage of having everything you own in the back of your truck, he knew there was a coat back there. He shrugged into it and pulled his hat lower over his eyes before stepping out of the truck. He laid a hand on the heated hood, "Thanks for getting me this far, Bubba." He retrieved his bags and began walking. Two miles from Hawkins.

He was soaked to the bone by the time he saw the sign. A familiar sight. One of the few bridges he hadn't burnt before leaving home. He walked through the backdoor into the kitchen, like he had a million times growing up. "Jesus, you look like hell." The big man greeted him, acting as if he wasn't surprised by Hopper's reappearance. "You try walking home in the rain sometime." Hopper shot back as Benny clapped a hand on his shoulder.

Benny didn't know all the details, but he figured if Jim Hopper stood soaking wet in his kitchen with garbage bag luggage, things must've fallen apart in the city. He gestured towards the bar with a nod. "Take a load off, I'll fix you something to eat. You can crash with me tonight." Hopper nodded, eternally glad that he didn't have to explain himself. Good old Benny. Always taking in strays. Cats, dogs, washed up high school football team mates.

He slid a burger and fries basket to Jim and a cold beer across the bar.

"Thanks, Benny. You're a real pal."

Hawkins stayed exactly the same and welcomed him back with open arms. With a shiny new badge he settled into his newest role in life.

Joyce's face was everywhere he turned. He shopped once a month just so he could avoid her in the store.

And he buried his heart in the bottom of a bottle again, mourning the death of everything good in his life. He made it his life's mission to avoid Joyce Byers until the day she stormed his office, angry over her drunken (ex) husband.

3. You Need Each Other

Summary for the Chapter:

Flo sits Hopper down for a little one on one.

She looked so tired as she sat in the chair opposite his desk.

She sat with her hands in her lap and he believed if she could, she'd disappear into the air around them.

"This is the second time this month, Joyce. Let me put a restraining order on him already." He offered.

"That won't help. Besides, I think he got the point this time."

Hop raised his eyebrows. "And what makes you think that?"

"Because Jonathan literally threw him out the front door. If that doesn't scream 'we don't want you here' then I don't know what will."

"At least press charges for your property, Joyce. Make him replace that window he smashed." He pressed.

She shook her head no, her hands wringing in her lap. He momentarily thought about rounding the desk to still them. "I just want to be done with him."

Hop reached into his desk drawer and withdrew a form. "Just sign it. That's all you have to do. Then I'll tend to him personally if he decides to harass you and the boys ever again." He offered the restraining order to her. "I can skip all the red tape and get it effective immediately."

She refused. "Just keep him in jail until he sobers up, please? Then I don't care what he does."

She made her break for the door and he gracefully stepped in front of her, blocking her way. "Joyce, you guys can't keep on like this. I know he's their father, but he'll never have anything to do with them. You know that."

For the first time during this meeting, her eyes met his. God, she looked so run down. "He's a shit, Hop. But what if something happened to him. Or to one of the boys? What kind of person would I be to keep him away from his kids forever?"

Hopper drew in a breath, knowing he was getting nowhere. He stepped aside and opened his door for her. "If he bothers you again, you call me personally, okay?" It was no secret between them that nothing would make him happier in this world than getting to arrest Lonnie Byers. Again.

Her hand rested on his forearm then, tiny and almost weightless. She stared up into his eyes. "Thank you, Hop."

He nodded to her, unsure of just what she was thanking him for. Without thinking he brushed a strand of hair from her face, tucking it behind her ear.

She gave him a tired smile. "Later, Hop."

"See you around."

He watched her as she walked away, momentarily thinking of her curves and just how he held them so many years ago.

"Can I talk to you for a moment, Chief?" Florence asked, peeking into his office where he now sat behind his desk.

"Sure thing, Flo."

He sat back behind his desk and reached for his coffee that he'd neglected. He grimaced when he took a sip, it'd gotten cold.

"For a police officer, you sure are oblivious."

He cocked an eyebrow at her. "What? Did I forget an appointment or something?"

"That's the second time you've let her walk out of here. Why don't you ask her out already?"

Jim nearly choked on his cold coffee.

"Any dummy can see you've got feelings for her."

"No I don't."

She made a disapproving noise. "You freeze whenever she's in a room. Your eyes are always on her. And really, tucking her hair behind her ear? You're in pretty deep, Chief."

He sighed and leaned back in his chair, his hands in his hair. "What do I have to offer to anyone?"

Flo chuckled. "A lot, according to the rumor mill."

Old Flo, she always was a straight shooter with him. As his childhood babysitter and now the backbone of his department, he dare not correct her. She was right, anyway.

"Joyce is too good for all of that. She deserves a good man. That ain't me."

Flo paused at his door. "You're a better man than you think, Jim Hopper. Give it time. You and Joyce Byers will end up together. You need each other."

Author's Note:

Hello guys! This was originally posted with several one shots on FF.net but I'll be turning them into a series here. Hope you enjoy it!